DEMOCRACY DIALOGUE

Conflict Task Force

USAID recently created the Agency Conflict Task Force (ACTF) to work with bureaus and field missions on ways to institute measures to precent deadly conflict. The ACTF has a mandate for one year, after which time it is expected to be integrated into other parts of the Agency. The assistant administrator for the Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination chairs the task force and reports directly to the Administrator.

Assessing Conflict

As part of the reorganization of USAID, the Center for Democracy and Governance has been assigned to the new Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance. Its position in the new bureau as the Office of Democracy and Governance will facilitate cooperation between DG and other parts of the Agency working on conflict issues.

In addition to participating in several working groups on violent conflict, the DG Office is elaborating on its strategic assessment framework. The new methodology will give guidance for analyzing conflict vulnerability and help missions to develop programs. The DG Office is expecting to pilot the new framework in the coming year.

Preventing and Managing Deadly Conflict through Democracy Assistance

Even before the events of September 11th, USAID had begun to address more systematically the causes of organized violent conflict. It is not hard to see why. The prevalence of deadly conflict in the world is well documented. In the last decade, armed conflict has scourged countries such as Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, and Macedonia in the Balkans; Columbia and Peru in Latin America; Afghanistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka in Asia; Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Sudan in Africa. The costs and impacts of such conflict undermine development in complex and multi-dimensional ways and, therefore, require multi-sectoral assistance responses. Key among these is democracy assistance. Through its democracy and governance programs, USAID helps foster non-violent, participatory, political means for countries to manage contentious issues, thereby helping prevent deadly conflict.

The Impact

The costs of violent conflict are human, economic, financial, and social, and the world's poor have suffered disproportionately. According to the *World Disasters Report 2001* published by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, of the 2.3 million people reportedly killed by conflict between 1991 and 2000, over three-quarters were from developing nations. Millions have been killed or forced to flee, requiring food, shelter, and medical care. Economies of affected states have severely eroded, if not collapsed. Farmers have been unable to plant and harvest. Natural resources have been depleted. Businesses and industries have been destroyed. Government institutions have been undermined and dismantled. Children have been educated in war and killing.

In addition to these costs, armed conflict spills across borders, drawing in neighboring states. The instability inherent in violent conflict and many conflict-prone states provides fertile ground for transnational crime, such as trafficking in illicit drugs, arms, forced labor, and threatened natural resources. Widespread frustration and discontent make citizens prone to manipulation by extremists. In some cases, such conditions enable the growth of international terrorism.

The Response

Responding to and preventing deadly conflict requires a wide range of tools, both short- and long-term. Crises require humanitarian assistance, diplomacy, and, at times, military intervention. Over the long term, assistance must address the shortcomings of state capacity and the social frustration that underlie conflict. These objectives call for responses that strengthen government accountability, support citizens' political and civil rights, and enable economic growth. USAID humanitarian assistance programs provide succor in crises. The Agency's transition initiatives help countries manage post-conflict issues, such as

PN-ACM-005

Supporting Peace Radio

Peace radio promotes conflict resolution and employs principles of democracy and governance. Operating in regions throughout the world, peace radio programs seek to offer balanced perspectives to widespread audiences, fostering understanding of opposing sides during and following conflicts.

In Rwanda, peace radio has been successful in increasing transparency and accountability. Countering hate radio used by the government during the 1994 genocide, peace radio informed civilians about the progression of the outbreak of violence, as well as humanitarian services. A USAID-funded project also brought news of the proceedings of the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda (ICTR) to the airwaves. Due to a lack of continuous coverage of proceedings, Rwandans previously had little faith in the ICTR and questioned the processes of justice. However, peace radio efforts provided consistent coverage, boosting citizen confidence and contributing to the path toward reconciliation.

Assessing Conflict Vulnerability

by Sharon Morris, Office of Democracy and Governance, USAID

Internal violent conflict emerges only after a long period of deteriorating social, economic, and political conditions. While the trigger that finally pushes a nation over the brink often catches the international community by surprise, the coming of the conflict is usually signalled for years in advance. Studying the factors that contribute to conflict and recognizing its devastating toll on human progress and well being, donors and development practitioners have begun to examine more closely many of the upstream causes of conflict.

Although there are limits to what the international community can do to stem violence and destruction, donors can exert a profound impact on the intern situation of a country through their programs. In countries at risk for deadly conflict, development assistance feeds into a complicated set of dynamics and produces explicitly political results. Because the factors that increase a country's conflict vulnerability can be found in all facets of development assistance, it is important to apply a conflict prevention lens to each sector.

Democracy and governance programs have a critical and cross-cutting role to play in any country context. Conflict is an inherent part of the democratic process: Democratic institutions are not meant to eliminate conflict; they are designed to manage it and channel it in productive directions. USAID's Office of Democracy and Governance is currently developing a conceptual framework that will hel identify causes of deadly conflict in particular country settings so that missions can make strategic use of their programs to break into the chain of events that leads to widespread violence. The framework helps missions to develop plans by classifying several broad categories of factors that contribute to conflict. Once these factors have been singled out, missions can begin to think through how to manage existing programs more effectively and design new programs that minimize contributing factors and create democratic coping mechanisms.

Structural or Root Causes

The framework begins by describing several structural or root causes of conflict, the most familiar of which is grievance. Ethnic or religious divisions, population pressures, poverty, unemployment, and environmental scarcity all fit into this category. Democracy programming in these cases must seek to reduce tensions and create channels to appropriately address them. Assistance in the Philippines that enhanced local leadership capacity among minority groups and created new opportunities for collaboration with local government illustrates that close attention to long-standing grievances can help to stabilize peace. On the contrary, ignoring grievances can escalate tensions. For example, without careful attention, decentralization programs could intensify conflict by handing over power to local elites and shutting out angry and marginalized factions of the opposition.

There is also a growing recognition that greed is a powerful motive for violence. Some groups and individuals, loosely termed "conflict entrepreneurs," stand to gain a great deal of power and wealth from violence through activities such as narco-trafficking, sales of diamonds, or looting and banditry on a smaller scale. The ongoing conflicts in West Africa, fueled by the diamond trade, and in Columbia, bolstered by the drug trade, illustrate that greed in particular requires a very different set of solutions than those that have traditionally been brought to bear in addressing grievance.

Access to Conflict Resources

While societal groups may have incentives to participate in violence, questions remain as to whether or not they have the means to do so. The framework directs attention to whether these factions have access to money and weapons, and on what scale. Identifying any international backers, pools of recruits, and organizational capacities will also influence programming.

Cross-sectoral initiatives are often instrumental to addressing conflict in this category. Small business development programs, benefiting disenfranchised youth and ex-combatants in Mozambique and Guatemala, as well as civil society programs engaging citizens in Indonesia and Nigeria have been powerful tools in helping to manage potential sources of violent conflict. Additionally, political party assistance programs have helped to build the capacity of legitimate organizations to manage conflict through democratic channels.

State Capacity and Political Leadership

The last category of conflict vulnerability examined by the framework deals with the ability of government to cope with the demands that are placed on it. Institutions and leadership are the filter through which all other causes of conflict have to pass. They can also interact powerfully with other causes; for example, institutions can fuel grievance through political exclusion or inefficiency. In transitional democracies where institutions are in flux and the rules of the game are not well defined, political elites may see polarizing violence along ethnic or other lines as an effective strategy for either gaining power or consolidating their bases of support. The ability of government institutions to block this type of opportunistic behavior is a critical measure of a country's vulnerability to conflict.

The evidence shows that democracy and governance programming has the greatest contribution to make toward reducing conflict vulnerability in this category. In nearly every respect, democracy and governance programming seeks to build state capacity and political institutions. Rule of law programs such as judicial reform in Central America and legislative strengthening initiatives in Namibia have helped to create proper legal channels to address the root causes of conflict. Advocacy and media programs in societies plagued by conflict as different as Angola and Croatia have successfully opened up means of communication and sparked civil dialogue, and elections assistance in places like Bosnia and East Timor have helped to promote the peaceful transfer of power.

Gaining Perspective

It is important to stress that not all conflict is bad. Conflict is often a precursor to positive change, and development requires change. With proper outlets, conflict can strengthen democracies, as did the protests that led to democratic elections in Serbia and Indonesia. Developing a deeper understanding of the causes of conflict and a country's vulnerability can help to aviod antagonizing existing hostilities, as well as create appropriate channels to address tensions peacefully. Likewise, it is important to note that these factors of conflict vulnerability do not stand alone. They work in a complicated series of dynamics in ways difficult to target with single programs, underscoring the importance of coordination and realizing the limitations of assistance.

In the new foreign policy climate where some argue that democratization must be sacrificed to the goal of stability, it is critical that donors and implementers continue to focus on the contribution that democracy programs can make to the twin goals of justice and peace. Although they cannot altogether abate the spread of violence, they are one of a series of tools in curbing deadly conflict. However, what is required for them to be effective is a clearer understanding of how democracy programs interact with underlying conflict dynamics and a more strategic focus on how they can work to address them constructively.☐

Employing Religious Values

Indonesia is in the midst of a dynamic democratic reform. In a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, The Asia Foundation (TAF) is working with Muslim leaders committed to encouraging democratic values and ways in which they are related to the Islamic faith. Through support to some 25 NGOs, TAF has supported Muslim leaders as key actors in programs promoting civic education, human rights, inter-community reconciliation, gender equality, and religious tolerance.

This integration of Islamic perspectives has been critical to promoting democracy and managing conflict in Indonesia. The approaches have been successful at reaching out to all levels of society in order to strengthen pluralist, democratic values within Muslim communities. For example, programming in the province of Aceh has targeted Islamic youth groups to spread a message of tolerance, stemming violence and promoting peace.

Conflict Prevention in Kyrgyz Land Reform Programs

by Allen Decker, Chief of Party, Chemonics International/Kyrgyzstan

By creating channels through which grievances can be resolved publicly and peacefully, the rule of law is intimately connected to conflict mitigation. It is often unappreciated, however, that the rule of law is ineffectual as an abstraction. Experience clearly shows that there is a substantial gap between legislating reform and implementing it. To be a reality, rule of law must coincide with the interests of citizens, and in turn, citizens must be cognizant of their rights and responsibilities.

In the case of rural subsistence economies in transition, citizens' interests are closely tied to their abilities to exercise a right of ownership to the land that supports them and their families. Despite the legislation of mechanisms for land tenure, citizens are likely to remain alienated and possibly provoke violence if they are not adequately familiar with land reform laws.

Informing the Citizenry

Kyrgyzstan has gone further toward privatization of rural land than any other country in the former Soviet Union. Chemonics recent experience implementing a USAID-funded program in Kyrgyzstan underscores that the implementation of land reform depends upon landowners' abilities to act as agents for the protection of their rights. Without knowledge of legal rights and reform procedures, there can be neither land reform nor rule of law.

Legal rights training is essential to help citizens understand their role and to ensure that channels of effective governance function. The Kyrgyzstan experience shows that training is most effective when intensely practical, short in duration, repetitive, and backed up by take home materials written in non-juridical speech in the local language. The involvement of children and young adults also provided another avenue to explore the subject. Piquing the natural curiosities and responsiveness of children in school-based or other types of programs can encourage questions being raised at home, increasing the discussion about land rights, the role of the government, and the role of ordinary citizens in the system.

Additionally, the largely successful mass media campaign in Kyrgyzstan focused on the basics. Attractive booklets, bearing the logo of the "Your Rights to the Land" campaign, were written in a simple question and answer format, addressing the fundamentals and frequently asked questions about land transactions. Sets of five pocket-sized booklets were published in Kyrgyz, Russian, and Uzbek and were distributed for free during short sessions run by trained information specialists selected from local non-government organizations, farmer organizations, and local agricultural activists.

Institutional Context

Equally important is the ability of government authorities who interface with landowners to understand the new procedures. Land rights training should include those government officials who exercise authority over matters of land use and law. By not fully understanding the reforms, authorities merely fall back on the habits of the former system, negating the best efforts of reformers and rendering

the new landowners cynical of their supposed rights. On the other hand, providing training to this population builds the government capacity to implement land reform and avoid problems that could result from conflicting messages.

At the same time, it is important to recognize the constraints that are common to systems of government. Frequently, the establishment of land rights and the creation of an adjudicative system to protect them are simultaneous processes in reform. Enforcing and defending landowner rights is often difficult given a vacuum of judicial procedures and inexperienced judicial cadre. For this reason, the goal of any land rights training should be focused on enabling landowners to rely on their own knowledge and efforts as much as possible, rather than thinking of each of them as a candidate for legal assistance. Legal aid is best envisioned as being necessary only in exceptional circumstances, not as the common rule.

Furthermore, the establishment of feedback mechanisms for reformers can gather grassroots experience, assemble it meaningfully, and report it upwards to the reform-minded leadership of the host country. Often, well meaning legislation misfires in reality or has consequences unintended by those who wrote it. Remaining diligent about these possible consequences may help stem catalysts of conflict before they are allowed to take root.

As a case in point, consider the Kyrgyz law governing rural land passed in January 2001. In their desire to protect Kyrgyz farmers from becoming the impoverished tenants of foreign landowners, deputies of the national parliament freighted the new land law with restrictions on ownership, specifically limiting ownership to Kyrgyz nationals, which meant that they had to be adult Kyrgyz nationals who had been residents of the given village for at least two years.

The effect of the legislation was to exclude people who had gone to the cities seeking an education from the opportunity to return to their native villages as landowners. This exclusion was made even more egregious since in Kyrgyzstan urban dwellers maintain frequent and close ties with relatives in their native villages and regions, often assisting them financially and feeling a moral commitment to their extended families in the regions. This example illustrates one of several negative unintended consequences that resulted from the lawmakers' stipulations. It also made clear that lawmakers need to be attuned to such consequences and be responsive to their constituencies in order to avoid situations escalating to deadly conflict.

In a Climate of Reform

Land rights training and implementation is an important instrument in conflict mitigation. It is readily apparent that land, in a subsistence agricultural economy, is truly one's stake in the economy and in the system as a whole. It is a truism that regimes are in the greatest danger during processes of reform. Alexis De Tocqueville famously expounded that expectations, rising in response to potential of change, can easily fuel unintended radicalism if they are not fulfilled. The gap between positive expectation and, therefore, support of a reform regime, and unintended radicalism undermining reform, marks the development of mass cynicism regarding the intentions of the reform government. This cynicism, and the ultimate rejection of reform among its potential beneficiaries, is intensified by the petty bribe taking, rent seeking, nepotism, and blatant corruption that are often pervasive in societies in transition.

Understanding that one has rights and that there exist available mechanisms to assert and utilize those rights promotes an attitude of hope toward the future and at least a benign tolerance of, if not support for, the reform regime. The idea that one has a role and stake in the present, transitional state of affairs buys time for a reforming regime and tolerance for its short-term failures. □

Role of Women's Organizations

In conflict and post-conflict transition environments, women's public responsibilities and roles expand beyond traditional social obligations and roles within the family. Women's organizations often support the peaceful resolution of conflicts by urging combatants to give up weapons. They assist refugees to resettle, help organize peace commissions, and participate in elections and voter education programs. In these capacities, women's organizations have a powerful role to play in bringing about conflict prevention, peace, reconciliation, and democracy.

During the 12-year civil war in El Salvador, the woman's group Comadres documented human rights abuses when assisting families to look for missing relatives, helping exhume corpses, and interviewing witnesses. Members also provided support to families and political prisoners. The group was successful not only in uncovering human rights abuses but also in changing political practices for women in El Salvador.

Elections Assistance in Conflict Settings

By Larry Sacks, Office of Democracy and Governance, USAID

USAID has provided electoral assistance to over 60 countries worldwide and is currently working on elections in a handful of countries considered at high risk for violent conflict, including Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe. While elections mark a critical point in the process of democratization, electoral competition in conflict settings tends to run along societal fault lines, making them vulnerable to both manipulation and violence. The contentious nature of elections and their potential to contribute to violence, especially in conflict settings, raises questions about how effective electoral assistance can be in high-risk countries.

Many policymakers argue that promoting democratization and, more specifically, providing limited electoral assistance to states that are prone to external and internal violence may exacerbate, rather than help resolve, the conflict. Burundi is often cited as one of the most dramatic cases of increased ethnic violence directly linked to multi-party elections. A coordinated effort by the international community to promote free and fair elections in Burundi in 1993 was followed by ethnic strife that resulted in the death of over 50,000 individuals within just a year of the elections. Alternatively, lessons drawn from El Salvador, Mozambique, Serbia, and dozens of other countries indicate that electoral assistance during democratic transitions does not necessarily prompt violence but can help to move countries on a path toward peace, prosperity, and democratization. However, their success also underscores the clear need to minimize the risk associated with electoral assistance in conflict prone settings.

Understanding Country Context

First and foremost, electoral assistance in conflict-torn nations requires an in-depth understanding of the sources of the conflict, as well as an ability to accommodate equitably the interests of competing groups. Deeply entrenched issues that underlie a conflict often run along ethnic lines, but what may actually trigger a violent struggle is elites' fear of losing power. If a democratic election is perceived as a potential challenge to the prevailing balance of power, then the election itself provides a natural incentive for the political elite to mobilize mass support and stir up ethnic, religious, or racial fervor in order to maintain control. An election in this environment risks becoming a smokescreen behind which the old order is able to persist without actual competition. When efforts to control the electoral process get muddled, as in Nigeria's 1993 election, incumbent regimes, in a desperate effort to maintain authority, may even reject the outcome of the election. This last resort effort to maintain control merely serves to advance the ongoing crisis and potentially ignites yet another source of unrest.

Options for Electoral Assistance

The success of efforts to polarize ethnic or religious support and to incite violence depends heavily on the internal political and economic climate at both the national and local levels. Although these factors may be more appropriately addressed by USAID support in other sectors, electoral assistance can potentially help to reduce tension. Election assistance linked to media programs, for example, can prevent the media from reporting on rumor and exacerbating volatile societal divisions. In countries such as Indonesia, media training has helped to create more informed and balanced reporting.

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continued from p. 6

Political party assistance is also an area where USAID might be able to simultaneously promote democratization and conflict prevention. With USAID assistance, as evidenced in South Africa in 1994, strengthened political parties are more likely to take advantage of incentives to appeal across ethnic or other crucial divisions and to develop programmatic rather than race-based campaigns. The timing of the electoral assistance in these instances is an extremely delicate matter that policymakers need to take into consideration. If the election is held too early, then elites may lack the proper motivation to reconcile; if it's too late, then the animosity on both sides of the table may be too deep to overcome.

One Component of Democracy Promotion

Elections in conflict settings remain fundamental for the legitimate transfer of power and broader democratic consolidation. However, potential unintended and detrimental consequences of ill-conceived or shortsighted assistance must be taken into account, particularly in high-risk countries. To minimize risk without exacerbating conflict, policymakers must understand the setting within which they are working, anticipate how conflict will arise during the election, and develop programs accordingly. Activities in institutional development, rule of law, civil society, and media, as well other types of USAID development programs are necessary elements of an overall strategy to mitigate conflict and promote democratic development. Likewise, a single set of elections does not alone signal the beginning of a democratic government. Democratic elections are but one cog of an intricate wheel of the democratic process, but if that one cog is flawed, then the entire process might grind to a halt and compel political competitors to continue using force, rather than the ballot box, to obtain power. □

continued from p. 1

citizen security, demobilization, and reconciliation; its democracy and governance programs target government accountability and political and civil rights. Improved governance, in turn, enhances opportunities to address contentious issues, such as unemployment, economic growth, health, and education.

Countries in the midst of political transitions are inherently volatile, as rules of the political game are in flux and institutional means for managing conflict are weak. USAID democracy programs seek to assist countries by supporting participation of excluded groups in government, facilitating consensus on rules for political competition, and strengthening government institutions accountable to broad-based constituencies. Achieving these goals helps to build a foundation for stable, capable democracies where grievances can be addressed peacefully.

USAID democracy and governance programs employ multiple means in this pursuit. Civil society programs support the exercise of citizens' political and civil rights, strengthening their ability to peacefully pressure governments to respond to citizens' needs. Rule of law programs strengthen court systems, providing legal avenues for citizens to address grievances. Governance programs enable governments to respond to citizen voices by more efficiently implementing policies in a transparent and participatory manner, thus mitigating grievances that can lead to widespread dissatisfaction and ultimately violence. Elections, by nature, are struggles for power, making them especially prone to violence. USAID's election programs seek to mitigate election-related conflict by increasing the transparency of electoral systems and supporting election monitors throughout the electoral process who can provide early warning of potential deadly conflict, enabling appropriate actors to intervene before violence escalates.

At their essence, USAID democracy and governance programs help create capable states and democratic societies. This fundamentally alters how citizens interact with the state and with each other, opening non-violent avenues to address contentious issues. It is with these democratic partners that the United States will engage to promote international security and economic growth. □

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DEMOCRACY AND CONFLICT RESOURCES

U.S. Agency for International Development
Office of Democracy and Governance
Contact: Joshua Kaufman, Conflict Group Coordinator
Tel: (202) 712-4234
Fax: (202) 216-3232
E-mail: joshuakaufman@usaid.gov
Website: www.usaid.gov/democracy

Center for International Development and Conflict Management
Contact: Barbara Bartsch-Allen, Assistant Director
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742-7231
Tel: (301) 314-7703
Fax (301) 314-9256
E-mail: cidcm@cidcm.umd.edu
Website: www.bsos.umd.edu/cidcm

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
Conflict and Peace Enforcement Project
Contact: Taylor B. Seybolt, Project Leader
Signalistgatan 9
SE-169 70 Solna
Sweden
Tel: +(46-8) 655 9747
Fax: +(46-8) 655 9733
E-mail: seybolt@sipri.se
Website: http://projects.sipri.se

Harvard Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research
The Conflict Prevention Initiative
Contact: Elizabeth Langdon, Project Manager CPI
1033 Massachusetts Ave.
Cambridge, MA 02319
Tel: (617) 384-5904
Fax: (617) 384.5908
E-mail: elangdon@hsph.harvard.edu
Website: www.preventconflict.org

International Crisis Group (ICG)
Contact: Heather Hurlburt, Deputy Director for ICG Washington
1522 K Street, NW Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005
Tel: (202) 408-8012
Fax: (202) 408-8258
E-mail: icgwashington@crisisweb.org
Website: www.crisisweb.org

World Bank
Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Program
Contact: Colin Scott, Acting Manager
1818 H Street, NW
Washington, DC 20433
Tel: (202) 458-2157
Fax: (202) 522-1669
E-mail: cscott@worldbank.org
Website: http://www.worldbank.org/ conflict

International Peace Research Institute, Oslo
Contact: Ingeborg K. Haavardsson, Information Director
Fuglehaugsgaten 11
0264 Oslo
Norway
Tel: +(47-22) 54 77 00
Fax: +(47-22) 54 77 01
E-mail: ingeborg@prio.no
Website: www.prio.no

European Centre for Conflict Prevention
Contact: Paul van Tongeren, Executive Director
P.O. Box 14069
3508 SC Utrecht
The Netherlands
Tel: +(31-30) 253 7528
Fax: +(31-30) 253 7529
E-mail: euconflict@euconflict.org
Website: www.euconflict.org

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